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ABSTRACT

Poor social skills among young elementary school students can result in lack of cooperation with others and an inability to resolve conflicts. This action research project examined the impact of a program for improving social competence through improving listening skills, cooperation, respect for others, and respect for authority. Participating in the project were 72 students across 2 kindergarten classrooms and 1 first grade physical education classroom from 2 schools located in a suburban community. Students' lack of social competence was documented by means of teacher and parent surveys, teacher anecdotal records, and behavioral checklists. The intervention had three components. First, a safe, caring, environment was established for the students. Second, direct lessons were provided involving role modeling, role play, and problem solving to teach cooperation. Third, direct lessons were used to teach conflict resolution. Lessons were taught throughout the school year. Effects of the intervention were assessed over 4 weeks through examination of students' discussions, parent surveys, teacher surveys, and the use of behavioral checklists and anecdotal records by teachers to assess social skills. Post intervention data indicated that the students exhibited more socially acceptable behaviors. Children began to learn the concepts needed for cooperative learning and the language necessary to resolve conflicts in a positive fashion. (Thirteen appendices include data collection forms and instructional materials. Contains 47 references.) (KB)

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IMPROVING SOCIAL COMPETENCIES THROUGH THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & Skylight Professional Development
Field-Based Master Program
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DEDICATION

We dedicate this project to one another for all the support and encouragement these past two years. This was truly a journey filled with love, laughter, tears, licorice and M&M's.

ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving social incompetencies while improving listening skills, cooperation and respect for one another and authority. The targeted population consisted of kindergarten and first grade students. The schools were located in a suburban community about 35 miles north of a large major city. The problem of social incompetencies was documented with teacher and parent surveys, anecdotal records and behavioral checklists.

The high level of social incompetency affected interpersonal relations among the students which resulted in lack of cooperation and inability to resolve conflicts. Some of the contributing factors to this escalating problem were home and societal issues.

A review of the solution strategies, suggested by other researchers, combined with analysis of anecdotal records, teacher observation and behavioral checklists, resulted in the development of a social skills program. The program provided a safe, nurturing environment which included direct lessons in cooperation and ways to resolve conflicts. Role modeling, role playing and problem solving were some of the content skills presented.

Post intervention data indicated that the students exhibited more socially acceptable behaviors. Children began to learn the concepts needed for cooperative learning and learn language necessary to resolve conflicts in a positive fashion.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Kindergarten/first grade students exhibit social incompetencies which are displayed through their lack of interpersonal relationships such as lack of listening skills, cooperation, respect for one another and authority. Evidence for these behaviors is documented through teacher anecdotal records, behavior checklists, and teacher and parent surveys.

Immediate Problem Context

Site A is a one-story, self-contained kindergarten building that has been in existence for seven years. The building houses 10 classrooms, 1 library, 1 gym, 3 support staff offices, a nurse's room, and a general office area. The staff consists of nine female kindergarten teachers. The rest of the faculty consists of necessary support staff to meet the needs of the mainstreamed, instructional learning disabled students (LD), bilingual students (ESL), speech, social work and related arts. Because of the small faculty, there prevails a warm and comforting environment which fosters a caring atmosphere. As of October,1998, the kindergarten school enrollment was 343 students, which averaged 22 children per class. Total enrollment for the K-8 district was 3,227 students. Staff in the kindergarten building, at that time, consisted of 18 members including 9 kindergarten teachers, 1 speech teacher, 1 part-time social worker, 1 part-time LD teacher, 1 part-time librarian, 3 teacher aides, 1 music teacher and 1 physical education teacher.

The kindergarten curriculum is based upon thematic units. The thematic units are taught using a whole language format. The following subjects are included in this format: phonics, mathematics, science, social skills and related arts including gym, music and library.

First grade physical education curriculum consists of locomotor activities, hand-eye coordination, throwing and catching skills, striking activities and games. In addition to the physical aspects of the program, good sportsmanship-like conduct is also addressed.

Ethnic background and low/limited income characteristics of the school population are included in Table 1 and Table 2. Site A has a White student population that is slightly lower than the state average, while the Black population is significantly less than the state's population. The Hispanic population is approximately double the state average. Site A's low income student population is below the state average of 36.3%. Limited English students total three times the amount of the state average.

At this writing, there is no statistical information for Site B due to a reconfiguration of buildings in the district. Formerly, this building contained only third and fourth grades. The site now is a newly formed building which houses 675 students in grades 1-4. There are seven first grade classrooms, six second grade classrooms, seven third grade classrooms, seven fourth grade classrooms and three Sedol classes. There is one principal and one assistant principal. Support staff consists of one full time nurse, one social worker, one and one-half reading specialists, two learning disability teachers, one support staff personnel teacher, two and one-half physical education teachers, one and one-half art teachers, one librarian and two full time speech therapists. In addition, bilingual, ESL and Triple A programs are provided.

Parents in the district were very supportive of the district reconfiguration. In part, the reconfiguration was performed due to the concerns of the district families. Parents

felt that schools that housed multiple grades would be more fulfilling than having buildings that only housed two grade levels.

Table 1

Racial and Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment

Site	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/P Islander	Native American	Total Enrollment
A	60.3%	4.4%	25.4%	9.9%	0.0%	343
District	71.0%	2.9%	16.9%	9.2%	0.0%	3,227
State	62.6%	20.8%	13.3%	3.2%	0.2%	1,951,998

Table 2

Low-Income and Limited-English Proficient Students

Site	Low -Income	Limited-English-Proficient
A	5.0%	18.1%
District	15.6%	9.1%
State	36.3%	6.3%

Teachers' salaries average $43,000.00 and administrator's salary average is $75,000.00. The teachers' educational experiences are listed in Table 3. The average teaching experience in the district is comparable to the state average. Teachers at Site A with a Bachelor's Degree fall slightly lower than the state's average of 53.5%. Teachers with a Master's Degree and above are slightly higher than the state's average of 46.3%.

Table 3

Teaching Experience/Education

	Average Teaching Experience	Teachers with Bachelor's Degree	Teachers with Master's & Above	Pupil-Teacher Ratio Elem.
District	15.2 Yrs.	48.9%	51.1%	17.7:1
State	15.0 Yrs.	53.5%	46.3%	20.0:1

The information on Table 4 tracks student attendance, mobility, and truancy. Student mobility is based on the number of students who enroll in or leave a school during the school year. Students may be counted more than once. Chronic truants are students who were absent from school without valid cause for 10% or more of the last 180 school days. In Site A, the attendance rate is slightly higher than the 93.9% of the state. Student mobility remains consistent with state records, and there is no truancy at this level.

Table 4

Attendance, Mobility, and Chronic Truancy

Site	Attendance	Student Mobility	Chronic Truancy	Number of Chronic Truance
A	95.0%	18.8%	0.0%	0
State	93.9%	18.2%	2.3%	43,167

In order to further understand the school community, it is necessary to look at its surrounding area. A description of the nearby community follows.

The Surrounding Community

The community is located about 35 miles north of a large major city. It has easy access to a major tollway, and easy access to two major airports. The community is in one of the most rapidly growing counties in a large metropolitan area, and is increasingly becoming a major employment center. It is also a major center of retail shopping.

The community has a large shopping mall, a vast array of restaurants and other retail stores. It also has many large corporations. The community population is 15,351 as of the 1990 census. The racial/ethnic groups consist of 90.82% White, 1.62% Black, .27% Native American, 6.19% Asian/Pacific Islander and 1.08% other. The school district serves three surrounding communities, with a per capita income average of $22,000.00, and a mean income of $60,000.00. The percent of residents listed as low poverty level is 3.9%, household average is 4.2 persons, and residential housing average is $195,000.00.

Major changes have occurred within the district during the past several years. The district is dealing with increasing enrollment due to two large developments of homes presently being built. The largest of these developments is expected to impact the district during the 1999-2000 school year, at which time, the district will be opening its doors to a new junior high school. That same year, the middle school will be housed in the present junior high location. Reorganization of lower grades will consist of two buildings of grades 1-4. Kindergarten will remain housed in its own building and a new option school building will house two classes from grades kindergarten through 6th. A Superintendent and an Associate Superintendent oversee a campus setting consisting of five buildings. Each school has its own principal and assistant principal, with the exception of the kindergarten building which has only a principal. The school board is comprised of a Superintendent, Associate Superintendent and

seven elected members of the community.

Community involvement is an important characteristic of the community. It includes a dynamic Parent Teacher's Organization (PTO) and many dedicated parent volunteers. In spite of the positive climate and community, there is a concern over the lack of social skills and negative behavior that children today are exhibiting upon entering kindergarten.

National Context of the Problem

Children today face an extremely challenging social environment. According to Bellanca (1992), there is an increased number of students who have little idea about how to behave in a social organization other than what they have learned from the negative social models that saturate their lives. A survey taken by U.S. News & World Report (as cited in Kauffman & Burbach, 1997) revealed that Americans think incivility is a serious problem, and 78% believe that the problem has worsened in the past 10 years. Of those responding, 91% said they think that the decrease in civility contributes to violence, and 4% think that it is eroding values. Stephen (1993) contends that today's children are not able to respect the rights of others, control expressions of anger, assert themselves in a socially acceptable manner, and share ideas and listen to the ideas of others. Furthermore, in its most recent report on the state of America's children, the Children's Defense Fund (as cited in Merrell,1992) painted an alarming picture of a nation in which an increasing percentage of young children are generally becoming increasingly at risk for a wide array of developmental problems.

Fordham University's Institute for Social Policy produces an Index of Social Health for the United States. The Index ranges between 0 and 100 (with 100 being the best). According to Miringoff (as cited in Garbarino, 1997), from 1970 to 1992, the Index showed a decline from 74 to 41. This means that the overall well-being of our

society decreased significantly.

"Kids today are in trouble, more trouble than kids were when I was growing up. Evidence of this is found in research on emotional and behavioral problems among American children" (Garbarino, 1997, p. 12). In support of this contention, Garbarino refers to a study that was conducted by Achenbach and Howell (as cited in Garbarino, 1997) in which they used a tool called The Child Behavior Checklist. This list of 118 specific behaviors were rated by parents (or other adults who knew the child well) indicating the presence (or absence) and intensity of these behaviors. In 1976, 10% of all children studied were found to be in need of therapy; by 1989, the number of children found to be in need of therapy had risen to 18%.

> Achenbach and Howell's data certainly conform to the observations of teachers and other professionals who work with children. In the past few years, I have had occasion to ask those who have worked with children professionally for 30 years or more what they have observed. They overwhelmingly agree that more and more children are in greater and greater trouble. (Garbarino, 1997, p.13)

According to Zimmerman and Shapiro (1996), a lack of social skills is one of the most common reasons that children get referred to a counselor or therapist. They further state that researchers are saying that not being able to make friends and join a peer group may have serious long range implications as well (Zimmerman & Shapiro, 1996). The teaching of Social Skills cannot be left to chance. Lantieri & Patti (1996) say that schools today must be committed more deeply than ever before to intentionally create a community and to pay attention to young people's social and emotional lives. Costa, Bellanca, and Fogarty (1992) believe that:

> The overriding implication for the future school is for students to learn how to relate in new and different ways. With the rapid turnover of people in their lives, students in tomorrow's schools will need help in finding ways to accelerate

> friendship formation, bond to stable forces in their lives, and develop the skills of collaboration. (p. 14)...Learning to interact and cooperate with culturally and socially diverse peers becomes the first key to school success. (p. 13)

Just as the lack of social skills is a problem at the national level, it is an issue that needs to be addressed at our site.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of social incompetencies in children, a Kindergarten/First Grade Parent Survey (Appendix A) and cover letter (Appendix B) were distributed to parents. A Teacher Survey (Appendix C) was distributed to kindergarten/first grade teachers at Sites A and B. Behavioral checklists (Appendix D) and Anecdotal Records (Appendix E) were kept by the three teachers involved in this study. These instruments were created to examine the extent of social deficits in kindergarten/first grade children at home and at school. A letter of consent (Appendix F) was given to parents asking permission for their child's data to be included in the final results. The purpose of each instrument and results are discussed.

Kindergarten/First Grade Parent Survey

As the parents entered the kindergarten classroom on Orientation Days, August 27 and August 30, 1999, they were presented with the Kindergarten Survey. A cover letter was attached requesting the return of the surveys by September 1. There was a popcorn party incentive, included within the text of the letter, if all surveys were returned by the designated date. Forty-seven surveys were handed out at Site A.

First grade surveys were dispensed to a randomly selected homeroom by the physical education teacher. The homeroom teacher distributed them to her students with a brief explanation. The children were told that they had one week to return the permission slips to the homeroom teacher. Twenty-five surveys were handed out at

Site B. Table 5 represents the percentages of responses to the 14 questions asked on the survey.

Table 5

Results From Kindergarten/First Grade Parent Survey

Behavior	% Always	% Some of the Time	% Never	% NA
Waits to speak	11	89	0	0
Follows directions	11	83	6	2
Uses Please	35	63	0	2
Uses Thank You	41	59	0	0
Uses Excuse Me	33	65	2	0
Uses I'm Sorry	30	70	0	0
Shares toys/belongings	54	44	2	0
Respects other's belongings	56	43	1	0
Takes turns	44	54	0	2
Gracious loser	15	65	11	9
Resolves conflicts verbally	22	72	4	2
Interrupts others	9	89	2	0
Interrupts when talking on phone	11	81	2	0
Talks back	6	74	15	5
Wants to be first	20	63	17	0
Resolves conflicts physically	6	81	6	7

The survey that was handed out to the parents asked questions related to social skill development and behavior outside of a school setting. The parents were to indicate their responses by checking the box that best corresponded to the frequency that their child demonstrated the target behaviors (always; some of the time; or never).

Of the 72 surveys handed out, 54 Parent Surveys were returned. The results of the Parent Survey indicate that over three-fourths of the children surveyed had some difficulty waiting their turn to speak and following directions. More than half of the students inconsistently used the words: please, thank-you, excuse me and I'm sorry some of the time. In addition, results show that children tend to interrupt others either when on the phone or in conversation. Another difficult area where children exhibited a lack of social skills was in the area of conflict resolution. The survey cited that a majority of the children showed a deficit in this area. In conclusion, the data provides evidence that a problem does exist.

Surveys were not only given to parents but to teachers as well. Teachers were asked to respond to questions relating to social behaviors observed in a classroom setting.

Teacher Survey

A Teacher Survey was distributed to 13 teachers at Site A and Site B. Of the 13 surveys handed out, 11 were returned and analyzed. The teachers were asked questions pertaining to social behaviors exhibited in the school setting. Teachers were to indicate their responses by checking the boxes that indicated the behaviors consistently demonstrated at school. The response choices were: usually, sometimes, or seldom. Table 6 represents the percentage of responses to the questions on the survey.

The results of the Teacher Survey showed that the majority of responses fell in the "Sometimes" and "Seldom" categories. Responses in the 50th or more percentile were: using please/thank you, excuse me/I'm sorry, sharing, taking turns, and showing empathy. Most of the percentages in the "Sometime" and "Seldom" columns were higher than the "Usually" column which indicates that a problem does exist.

Table 6

Results From Teacher Survey

Kindergartners display the following behaviors:	% Usually	% Sometimes	% Seldom
Say: Please/Thank you	21	55	24
Say: Excuse me/I'm sorry	0	52	48
Share	45	55	0
Take turns	32	63	5
Show empathy	21	57	22
Reconcile differences	9	45	46
Help others	22	45	33

In addition to the Teacher Survey, a teachers' Behavioral Checklist was created to observe social behaviors in the classroom setting. The checklist was kept by the teacher researchers to record specific targeted behaviors.

Behavioral Checklist

A behavioral checklist was developed to note the frequency of incidents of negative social behaviors in the classroom. The checklist was kept for the first four weeks of the new school year. Tally marks were given to those students who exhibited improper behavior during the school day. Two categories that have been determined to be of most importance were verbal and physical social manners (defined below). The results of these tallies are listed in Table 7 which confirm that social incompetencies are evident at the targeted population.

Table 7

Number of negative behavioral Incidents during a four week period

Behaviors	Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4	
Site	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Verbal Social Manners								
Does not wait turn to speak	61	6	142	7	108	11	95	6
Interrupts other's conversations	96	9	123	12	93	6	89	5
Does not follow directions	132	4	112	10	99	6	92	13
Talks back	4	2	4	2	3	0	1	0
Does not use please, thank you etc.	229	0	249	2	201	0	184	0
Physical Social Manners								
Does not share easily	6	0	4	2	3	0	0	0
Does not respect toys/belongings	4	0	3	0	3	5	1	0
Needs to be first	19	1	31	0	27	0	25	4
Does not take turns	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Not a gracious loser	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Gets physical	8	3	3	1	8	5	4	4
Total	567	29	671	36	545	33	491	31

Site A consists of two kindergarten classrooms with the average age being five years. The children were observed for two hours daily for a four week period. During that time, there were 567 incidents of negative behavior in week one, 671 incidents in week two, 545 incidents in week three and 491 in week four. It was noted that incidents were lower in week one as compared to week two, which may be attributed to the children's adjustment to a new environment. There was a decrease in occurrence in week three of both physical and verbal social manners which may have been due to the direct teaching of these skills.

Site B, a first grade physical education class, is comprised of 25 six year olds, who meet three times a week for a period of 35 minutes. Twenty-seven negative behavioral incidents were recorded the first week, 36 the second, 33 the third and 27 the fourth. A significant change in behaviors was not evident during these four weeks, perhaps due to the children's familiarity with school procedures and expectations.

Most negative behavioral incidents consisted of acts which were within the acceptable ranges of conduct; however, some children displayed behaviors which exceeded the norm. These childrens' behaviors were documented through anecdotal records. These anecdotal records were another means of discovering the prevalancy of the social problem.

Anecdotal Records

Of the 72 children that were observed in the classrooms, six children needed to have anecdotal records kept to log more severe negative behaviors. These six children required more one on one instruction in the use of positive social skills. In the primary schools, there does not exist a schoolwide discipline program for negative behaviors; therefore, such situations are handled in the individual classrooms. These children were reminded of the rules that they had signed, promised to obey and follow. Through the use of dialogue, and direct teaching, a more appropriate behavior was discussed and agreed upon. Depending on the severity of the episode, these children were occasionally placed in an area away from other children until they were able to conduct themselves in a socially acceptable manner. If the conduct was not severe, the entire class was questioned as to how to solve the immediate problem. Once again, role playing, modeling and direct teaching were necessary to reinforce positive social skills.

One serious situation occurred when a student was caught stealing items from a teacher's desk and from the toy area. Another student became angry and felt spitting

was the best way to solve his problem. A different situation involved a boy who pulled down the pants of another child and kissed the other child's bottom. Another child was caught destroying a teacher's bulletin board by pulling items off the board.

The data collected from the Kindergarten/First Grade Parent Survey, Teacher Survey, Behavioral Checklist and Anecdotal Records indicate that negative social competencies are evident in the targeted population. Although the numbers of observed behavioral incidents were higher at Site A than Site B, it is obvious that both sites have social problems that need to be addressed. In the next section, probable causes will be explored.

Probable Causes

Kindergarten/first grade children lack the social skills needed for positive interaction with their peers and others. There are several contributing factors to substantiate this observation. The major precipitous is the home. Changes in family structure play a significant role in the demise of social competencies. Another contributing factor is the media including TV, computer, and video. Solitary activities lead to less human contact, resulting in less practice of social skills. Further, some would say that these societal changes result in a decline in emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence, as defined by Goleman (O'Neil, 1996), is "...knowing what your feelings are and using your feelings to make good decisions in life." Therefore, it can be concluded that the breakdown of home and family, the influence of the media, and the lack of emotional intelligence training are some of the probable causes that lead to social incompetencies amongst children.

Home and Family

The traditional family, as once known, has drastically changed. No longer is the mother the homemaker and the father the breadwinner. Today, it is more common to see single working parents or dual-working parents. According to Kains, Downs, and

Black (1998), it appears to be necessary for schools to be responsible for teaching children social behavior due to this change in family dynamics. Prior to kindergarten entrance, however, many working parents have no choice but to rely on others to watch their children. Wolfgang and Kelsay (1992), cited that parents work long hours, leaving their children for 10 or 12 hours a day with a variety of unskilled child care workers. Many times, these care givers are other women who are not properly trained in child development. Another alternative are daycare centers, who hire staff that have minimum qualifications in dealing with children. These adult role models are not necessarily the ones children should emulate. Parents are realizing that there is a lack of training provided for care takers in homes that provide daycare and in daycare centers as well. Because students spend so much time with negative social models, they do not know how to behave in a social situation (Bellanca, 1992). The loss of parent-child involvement impacts not only the child but the parents as well. Zinsmeister (1998) supports this observation by stating, "Parents who use day care tend not to develop the kinds of parenting skills, or the self-confidence in dealing with their children..." (p. 5). As a result of the inadequacy of parenting skills and untrained caretakers, children lack life skills, character development, and good role modeling of positive behaviors. Since parents spend less discretionary time with their offspring, these children have more opportunities to sit in front of the TV, computer, or video screens.

Media

Ironically, technology has increased society's capabilities, while simultaneously isolating individuals from contact with others. Instead of developing interpersonal relationships, children spend much of their time in isolation, sitting in front of a screen. "More time spent in front of TVs and computers means children are not learning the emotional skills that we learn by interaction with other children and other adults"

(O'Neil, 1996, p. 11). Traditional values of society, such as cooperation, kindness, and problem solving are negatively impacted by violence and anti-social behavior that children are exposed to on television and video games. Programs, such as "The Simpsons" and "South Park," glorify young people that are rude, disrespectful, and amoral. Adults are portrayed as stupid and ignorant. Frequently, conflict resolution is violent and executed without respect for others. These behaviors are represented as acceptable and the norm. Without parental supervision, the models for children's behavior become what they see in the media. Children begin to emulate these negative social skills, perceiving that these are the normal, acceptable ways of conduct. Bellanca (1992) stated, "...when we combine the enormous number of hours that young people sit in front of the television each week with the decrease of adult supervision, support, and direction, we can readily see why the electronic baby-sitter has such a negative influence on young minds" (p. 202). Likewise, when children sit in front of a computer, they are missing out on the give-and-take of human interaction. Video games often portray violence, in which people are maimed or killed, leading to children becoming desensitized to these atrocities. As a result of these "electronic babysitters," children are not taught the necessary skills to interact in different social settings and situations. Lack of social skills is related to another pertinent topic in the area of social development, a decline in the emotional intelligence of youth.

The Decline of Emotional Intelligence

What exactly is emotional intelligence? Emotional Intelligence consists of qualities that make people successful in life. These qualities include: knowing one's emotions and managing them, self-motivation, empathy and handling relationships (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence is responsible for successful, well-adjusted, happy people. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is more important than intelligence quotient and he feels that society is negligent in educating and

developing a child's emotional intelligence thereby leading to the social incompetencies evident at the sites that were researched in this project.

Social problems are occurring due to the societal changes of the twentieth century where parent and peer interaction, positive role models, changing family situations, and electronic babysitters have altered the ways in which children are raised. Many children are not taught how to deal with their anger or how to take turns or share. Children come to school with the inability to cooperate with others and problem solve, and therefore, schools are experiencing more disruptive behaviors. Research has shown that "...peer contacts are important for the development of competent and adaptive patterns of social behavior" (Shaffer, 1994, p. 539). Without these learned skills, a plethora of problems arise which impacts the child's ability to interact positively with peers. Social skills are lifelong tools needed for the survival in society.

Children today lack the social competencies needed for cooperative interaction and conflict resolution. It has been documented that of the six students in this study who exhibited more negative social behaviors, one came from a divorced family and five came from intact families. Five out of the six attended daycare before and after the school day. This information confirms the data that children do not receive instruction in positive social interaction when the breakdown in families occur or when children spend a major portion of their time in daycare. Since children are not receiving these skills from the family environment, the teaching is left to the schools.

Society is becoming concerned about the lack of social skills in schools and in the corporate world as well. As a result of this concern, a copious amount of literature is being printed with respect to this topic.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Social problems are occurring due to the societal changes of the twentieth century where parent and peer interaction, positive role models, changing family situations and electronic babysitters have altered the ways that children are raised. Sociologists have studied the effects that different family structures may have on student achievement and behavior in school and concluded that the changes in family dynamics do make a difference (Comer, 1987). Due to the lack of parental involvement at home, many children are not taught how to deal with their anger or how to take turns or share. Children often do not do what one says, but what one does. Therefore, it is crucial for parents and teachers to model prosocial behaviors in the early years. McClellan and Katz (1992) warn that if children do not achieve minimum social competencies by the age of six, they are potentially at risk for having antisocial behaviors throughout their lives. Children are coming to school with inabilities to cooperate with others and problem solve. This is evident because teachers are spending more time disciplining students for inappropriate social behaviors. Because of this situation, school districts are beginning to offer programs dealing with conflict resolution as part of the daily curriculum routine (Wilburn & Bates, 1997). Educators must spend time teaching children to recognize and manage their emotions, and teachers need to model these emotional intelligences by interacting with children in a caring and respectful manner (O'Neil,1996). Schools, therefore, must take the

responsibility to provide children with strategies for interacting with others as well as conflict resolution through social education. Berreth & Berman (1997) state that modeling, direct instruction, experience and continual practice is needed to help develop social skills and moral values in the children. Apparently, if it is a school's job to academically prepare students for their future, schools need to give them the necessary social education as well. "Further, a strong consensus supports the idea that the academic work of the children - especially its application to real life - benefits directly from the time spent on social and emotional learning" (Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum & Schuyler, 1997, p. 19).

It becomes evident that children can be taught social skills, and it is in the classroom where these skills can naturally be acquired. Children need to grow up with prosocial behaviors if they want to lead happy, successful lives. If this is to occur, teachers must play an integral part in the instruction of these skills. There are three essential elements of social skill instruction that teachers can impart to their students.The first part of any program is providing a safe, nurturing environment. When this is in place, cooperative grouping and conflict resolution can follow.

Safe, Nurturing Environment

For any type of learning to take place, whether academic, social or emotional, a brain compatible classroom is an important piece of the puzzle. According to Fogarty (1997), the brain-compatible classroom provides for diminished anxiety and fear and enables learners to function at their optimum cognitive levels. Anxiety, fear and threat take over when children feel they are not in a safe, caring and nurturing environment. When they feel safe, the cognitive brain is able to process information, rather than allow the emotional brain to take over. Elias, et al (1997) state:

> Building a safe and collaborative classroom environment in which children can sort out their feelings, put aside their hassles, and appreciate

> the joy of learning provides lifelong benefits that children miss out on when they are too angry, hurt, or scared to participate in learning. (p. 17)

Children are experiencing more stressful lifestyles and therefore need a location where they can go to feel safe. The classroom should be such a place. From the very first day of school when children are escorted to school by their parents, children feel a sense of belonging by being met at the door by teachers who greet the students personally with a smile and/or handshake as they walk into the classroom. This conveys the message that children are entering an environment that will be happy and secure. The foundation is then laid for positive self-esteem and success (Shore, 1998).

According to Shore (1998), as school progresses, the physical classroom should contain colorful examples of children's work. Areas in the classroom should allow for individual, small and large group learning activities. Within the classroom setting, there should be a quiet place where a child can go if he/she needs time to be alone. There should also be accommodations where small groups could gather when working cooperatively. In addition, a larger space should be available for whole group activities. Designing a classroom which has many centers of interest allows children to learn separately or together (Lamb & Logsdon, 1991). Bellanca and Fogarty (1991) insist that movement from one place to another should be done swiftly and quietly. This movement should be taught and practiced prior to breaking into cooperative groups. When children feel comfortable in their environment, they feel secure enough to begin interacting with others around them.

It is important for team-building activities to take place from the start of school to promote a sense of community and trust. Kohn (1996), believes that building such a classroom community leads to students who feel valued and care about others. Team building activities would include exercises for learning children's names, recognizing

individualities, multicultural differences, feelings, community building, making friends, cooperation, sharing, caring, respect and rule making. Logan (1998) states that if children make a set of classroom agreements, "...that would ensure an atmosphere free of ridicule, threats, and exclusionary practices" (p. 22).

Once team building and sense of community has been established, cooperative grouping can then slowly be introduced. This type of learning is very effective in teaching social values and skills.

Cooperative Grouping

Collaborative skills are an essential part of life. As children become part of the workplace, cooperative interactions are unavoidable. Children must be taught how to work effectively with one another. This will have a definite impact on their future. "Responsible behavior cannot be dictated; the classroom belongs to everyone, not just the teacher" (Henley, 1997, p. 45). Cooperative groups provide children with opportunities to act responsibly.

Working together in small groups to maximize mastery of information is cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1992). "A substantial number of studies have found that cooperative learning of various types has the potential to help students feel good about themselves, feel good about each other, feel good about what they are learning, and learn more effectively" (Kohn, 1995, p. 39).

In the targeted population, direct teaching of cooperative learning skill rules is necessary. To work effectively in cooperative groups, the students needs to be taught how to listen to others, remain with their group, give encouragement, use six-inch voices, maintain eye contact, and respect the opinions of others. These skills are not naturally acquired but must be taught, retaught, and constantly monitored. For cooperative grouping to take place, "Students must be taught the interpersonal and small group skills needed for high quality cooperation and be motivated to use them"

(Johnson & Johnson, 1992, p. 181). By working in these groups, teachers are trying to get the children to work together and trust and share with each other. Teachers have several responsibilities when dealing with cooperative groups: presenting problem-solving scenarios, interacting with the groups, providing non-judgmental feedback, and assessing individual and group progress while continuously modeling prosocial behaviors (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991).

Teachers should construct groups with an eye for diversity and balance and it should promote equality and diversity by mixing gender, ethnicity and social class (Vermette, 1995). According to the Johnsons and Holubec (1993), in the lower grades, groups should consist of two to three students. Miller (1997) believes that a teacher should have a bag of tricks for getting students into groups. Some of Miller's tricks are: proximity pair, line up and count off, matching cut-out shapes, matching puzzle pieces, matching items in general, and grouping according to attributes.

Once in groups, children are given roles. Roles in the group can consist of recorder, checker, speaker, materials manager and encourager (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1993). Roles are necessary so that all children feel that they are an active participant in the group. Teachers must be willing to give up some control in their classroom when cooperative grouping is involved. A constructivist classroom is more conducive to this type of learning atmosphere.

Cooperative groups are begun in the kindergarten classroom to stress such skills as manners, listening skills, following directions, working together, showing respect to others and waiting one's turn to speak. When children learn from one another, interdependence is promoted and competition is demoted (Kohn, 1995). Today's society is moving in a direction where people need to be able to work cooperatively with others in order to achieve and be successful. Johnson and Johnson (1992) state that through cooperative learning, children realize that competition has its

place but working together so that everyone triumphs is the goal. Children learning from each other create strong bonds. Further, Johnson and Johnson (1992) believe that this type of learning is quite different from the traditional classroom where each student is responsible for his or her own learning. When children are responsible for their own learning, competition returns and is counterproductive to the cooperative learning environment.

Cooperative grouping facilitates the development of personal and social responsibility (McCabe & Rhoades, 1992). When children are involved in the running of their class by helping, sharing, participating, planning and working together, they begin to take ownership and become better disciplined. This is what Freiberg (1996) feels makes up the heart of the cooperative classroom.

Nightingale (1991) states:

> Getting along well with other people is still the world's most needed skill. With it...there is no limit to what a person can do. We need people, we need the cooperation of others. There is very little we can do alone. (p. 22)

Besides having the ability to work cooperatively with others, students must be able to control their anger in social situations. Anger can be controlled through conflict resolution, the third essential element of social skill instruction.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is not the avoidance of conflicts but rather teaching students how to handle them. Johnson and Johnson state "the heart of conflict resolution training is teaching students how to negotiate constructive solutions to their problems" (1996, p. 325). Wichert (1989) states that one of the most important skills needed for conflict resolution is the ability to communicate clearly. This involves both expressive and receptive language. There are three components in expressive communicative

skills: 1.) receiving the other person's attention by addressing the person by name and establishing eye contact, 2.) speaking in clear voices while maintaining eye contact, and 3.) stating problem/feelings clearly and concisely. Wichert (1989) feels that younger children find it extremely difficult to express their problems or feelings in words; therefore, teachers must consistently model this sort of language.

Wichert (1989) continues that receptive skills also involve three components: 1.) staying focused and listening and responding to what is said including movement to an area where there will be fewer distractions, 2.) stating needs clearly and remaining on tract during the conversation, and 3.) nonverbal communication or body language.

For these skills to be learned, various methods of instruction must be implemented. One method is through the use of direct teaching. According to Joyce and Weil (1996) direct teaching addresses academic content systematically. Through sustained motivation, success and positive feedback, self esteem is enhanced. "...the direct instruction environment is one in which there is a predominant focus on learning and in which students are engaged in academic tasks a large percentage of time and achieve at a high rate of success" (Joyce & Weil, 1996, p. 344). Direct teaching allows for students' continual practice under the teacher's guidance. Joyce (Joyce & Weil, 1996) contends that both oral and visual representations (VRT) of the learning task are an important part of direct teaching. Classroom expectations need to be taught and charts and graphs which pictorially illustrate expected classroom behavior should be prominently displayed in the classroom. Types of posters that can be displayed are prosocial behavior pictures, T-charts that show what words look like, rules that need to be followed for cooperative groups, good listening manners, classroom rules, a pledge for intrinsic behavior and conflict resolution solutions. Direct teaching enables students to better handle their anger and frustrations (Cummings & Haggerty, 1997).

Bellanca (1992) describes a direct instruction transfer model which was pioneered by the Johnsons. This model calls for six key steps in teaching social skills. The first step consists of a "hook" or "set." Children are actively engaged in an activity that allows them to observe and assess their own use of the social skill that they are learning. The second step is the lesson. At this time, the children reflect on what they did and said during the activity. Third, children practice the focused acceptable behaviors in structured settings until they become comfortable with the social skill. Fourth, students reflect and discuss what they have learned about the skill. Is it working? Can the practice of the skill be improved? Is the skill helping? Can the skill be used in other situations? Fifth, as the children become more adept in the use of the targeted skill, children are rewarded for their use of it in appropriate situations and sixth, students are encouraged to transfer the targeted social skill outside the classroom.

When children do not possess these social skills, they feel others are ridiculing or embarrassing them (Holden, 1997). Self respect is retained when children have the resources to use positive strategies in interaction with others (Gruber, 1997). Schools are responding to these needs by promoting in school programs to teach children how to deal with conflict resolution and yet keep their self-respect.

Cummings and Haggerty began a study in 1993 called "Raising Healthy Children" (1997).The goal of the study was to teach social and emotional skills at a young age which would bond students to family and school and reduce the risk of developing problems in adolescence. The study included various strategies which incorporated staff development, parenting workshops, home-based services and student activities. In addition, units were created to help teachers with direct instruction, practice, reinforcement and skills that they had learned at staff development meetings. The *Get-Alongs* (Cummings, 1996), were books dealing with

interpersonal and problem-solving skills. Each unit dealt with a specific social skill and took approximately a month to teach. In addition, literature, visuals, writing activities and role playing were also included in the lessons. Through staff development, teachers were taught how to help students become self-managers, develop internal qualities that promote success, become better mood managers, cooperative learners and integrate social/emotional learning through the use of literature. According to the teachers involved in the study, long-term improvements in students' behavior has been reported.

At a school in Pittsburgh, the Students Against Violence program is used. Created by Holden (1997), this program consists of a classroom atmosphere that looks and feels physically and emotionally safe. Children start the day with a positive message from the teacher followed by recitation of the class rules. Then, a rap song, "Hugs Not Slugs" concludes the morning ritual. Avoidance of violence is infused throughout all areas of curriculum. Literature is one type of media used to illicit questions about dealing with conflict.

Although schools have seen children taking ownership for actions where conflict resolution programs exist, some educators feel that these programs are fads and that teachers already deal with these skills daily (Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, Schuyler, 1997). Other objections are time constraints, coordinating programs, funding and teacher training. But further observations show that these concerns can be addressed in a positive manner.

Since effective teaching includes building social and emotional skills, they can be integrated into other curriculums such as family, critical thinking, celebrating you and me, and self-esteem. In order to coordinate existing programs with new ones, it would be necessary for planning to take place. A coordinator would be needed to be in charge of reviewing the programs, identifying the overlaps and developing

strategies so both activities could work.

Hightower (as cited in Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum & Schuyler, 1997) of the Primary Mental Health Project in Rochester, New York, believes that it is not the cost of a social and emotion learning (SEL) program that is important but "...the cost of what will happen without spending the money now" (p. 18). Hightower (1997) encourages districts to start where they can learn and be successful and build from there. Building a social skills program takes time. It needs on-going assessment, reevaluation and adjustment.

Teachers often feel unqualified to teach social skills. Staff development is necessary to make teachers feel more confident. Activities such as monitoring implementations, monthly staff meetings, and developing teacher networks are just a few of successful activities. It appears that social skill programs are not merely fads but should be included in a sound educational program.

The social skills needed for conflict resolution need to be continuously taught, modeled and reinforced (Burke, 1992). Some conflict resolution skills are: exploring different points of view, negotiating and/or compromising, thinking for yourself, respecting others' opinions, disagreeing with an idea not a person, and reaching a consensus (Burke, 1992).

In addition to interpersonal conflict resolution strategies, teachers have a responsibility to foresee discipline problems and try to prevent them from occurring. According to Burke (1992), teachers should take a proactive approach to teaching. The proactive teacher should anticipate potential behavior problems, address minor problems before they escalate, and respond to disruptive behaviors immediately. "If teachers don't take the short time to re-educate students with positive social skills, they will spend a great deal of time "correcting" and "disciplining" disruptive students throughout the year" (Burke, 1992, p. 499). Through teacher modeling of these

classroom situations, students should learn and use the same problem strategies in their environment.

Another responsibility teachers have is to promote social/emotional learning through literature (Freiberg, 1996). Quality literature can be used to validate children's feelings and give information about emotions. Teachers can use literature to initiate specific topics and concepts related to conflict resolution or social issues. Dr. E. Owens (personal communication, December 21, 1999), an early childhood educator and reading specialist, believes that a book can model situations involving conflict without putting a child directly into the setting. Further, Dr. Owens feels that literature puts a child in a safe, protected environment to solve a conflict. She feels that if a child is not personally involved, literature can be a tool that helps develop independent skills for acceptable behavior. (A suggested list of literature to promote social skills can be found in Appendix G)

Research from Goleman (1995) and Gardner (1993) show a relationship between ones' emotions, thought processes and actions. In order to be successful in life, one needs a full complement of skills including the social, emotional and academic factors. London (1997) says:

> Sometimes you do not see it in the younger students, but with the older students who have learned to apply the skills, adults are able to stand back and watch the students self-evaluate and self-monitor their own behavior. It is like any other type of learning-you first need to learn the pieces in isolation, but then you can start to put the pieces together and apply them. That is when the learning is most beneficial, when the students can apply it and take it with them through life. (p. 16)

In summary, the ultimate goal of conflict resolution is to impart to children the "...skills of reasoning, justifying, seeking consensus constructing controversies, and

seeking solutions and alternatives" (Bellanca & Fogerty, 1991, p. 347).

The literature review clearly supports the evidence that in order for children to learn at their optimum, there must be a climate that prevails which allows students the opportunity to make mistakes without the fear of ridicule or rejection. Further, the literature maintains that cooperative grouping in the early years lays the foundation for future successes and finally, techniques for handling conflicts in socially acceptable ways provides for win-win situations when disagreements occur.

Project Objective and Processes

As a result of teaching social competencies through conflict resolution and cooperative learning during the period from September 1999 through December 1999, the kindergarten classes will exhibit an increase in positive social skills. This increase will be measured by teacher anecdotal records, student behavioral checklists, interviews with students, and post parent surveys.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. To provide a safe, nurturing environment where self-esteem flourishes and risk taking is encouraged
2. To utilize cooperative grouping where the opportunity for everyone to learn at his/her maximum is provided
3. To provide appropriate choices in resolving conflicts

Project Action Plan

There are three components involved in this social skills program. First, a safe, caring, environment must be established. When children have a significant voice in class planning, making decisions and solving problems, and believe their fellow classmates care about them, a feeling of belonging in a class community will take place (Schaps, Lewis & Watson, 1997, p. 14). Second, a child must be able to work

cooperatively with others. Joyce and Weil (1996, p.67) report, "Interacting with one another produces cognitive as well as social complexity, creating more intellectual activity that increases learning when contrasted with solitary study." The third component is teaching strategies for resolving conflicts. It is necessary to promote talking and listening, finding several solutions to a problem and agreeing on one, problem solving together and making appropriate choices (Kohn, 1993). These are the foundations on which to build a strong social skills program.

A comforting environment, cooperative learning opportunities and conflict resolution are the keys to promoting prosocial behaviors. Teaching of these skills begin on the first day of school and continue throughout the school year. Lessons are short in duration at the beginning of the school year, usually five to ten minutes in length. As the children's attention span increases, lessons can be lengthened. After social skills are introduced in a formal lesson, the skills are continuously modeled and retaught on an ongoing basis.

In the first week, lessons will be taught that foster an environment where all children feel emotionally safe and unafraid to take risks. A sense of community will be established where children feel that they have ownership of their classroom and have a say in how things are handled .

Day One:

Read: The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn

Activity: Make hand imprints using washable ink pads. Add poem to bottom.

Pass out Hershey's Hugs and Kisses candy at the end of the day.

Day Two:

Read: Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes

Activity: Play "Higgety Biggety Bumblebee"

Day Three:

Read: The Rainbow Fish by Marc Pfister

Activity: Create a classroom puzzle for community building

Day Four:

Read: Will I Have a Friend by Miriam Cohen

Activity: Make class rules and have children sign them

Day Five:

Read: On Monday When it Rained by Cherryl Kachenmeister

Activity: A poster visually depicting different feelings will be shown and a discussion and role playing of feelings will follow.

To capsulize the first week's lessons on creating a sense of community, children will start to become attuned to feelings and body language of classmates. These two areas will be integrated continuously throughout the curriculum.

In conjunction with feelings, class rules must be agreed upon during the first weeks. Children must take a definite role in this process if they are to internalize and use them consistently. Role-playing scenarios will be set up between two teachers where children observe prosocial and antisocial behaviors. After observing these skits, a discussion follows which illicit a list of rules. If the list is too long or redundant, the class will vote on which rules will remains on the list and which will not. After the list of rules is generated, each student will sign it and it will be posted on the wall of the classroom. This will be a visual reminder of classroom behavioral expectations.

During the second and third weeks of school, children are introduced to the concept of cooperation. The word "cooperation" is demonstrated by reading the book, The Little Red Hen. A discussion will follow to assess the children's level of comprehension through the characters' behaviors in the story. Once the children are

comfortable with the definition, direct teaching of the skills needed for cooperation are taught. These skills include listening, following directions, working together, showing respect, waiting one's turn to speak, looking at the person who is speaking, staying within the group, and showing manners. The understanding of these skills are necessary before groups can be formed.

In order to teach cooperative learning skills, graphic organizers, T charts (Appendix H), literature, role playing, and visuals will be used. After the rules have been established, a visual poster focusing on cooperation will be created (Appendix I) and displayed in a prominent place in the classroom where it can be referred to often.

During weeks three and four, children will slowly be exposed to cooperative groups. Initially, children will work together at their assigned tables being responsible for preparation of the daily routine. These responsibilities include putting papers in backpacks, having supplies at tables, and having name shirts put on. At the end of the day, supplies and name shirts are to be put away, and their area cleaned up. A daily checklist (see Appendix J) will be kept by the teacher, initially, to record the cooperative interaction of the group. The reasoning for this type of cooperative group is to put class management into the students' hands.

An outline follows which presents the scope and sequence for cooperative grouping and conflict resolution.

I. Safe, nurturing environment (September)

A. Teacher's role - Facilitator

1. Puts children into base groups
2. Oversees that children are interacting

B. Student's role - Begin using appropriate social skills

1. Students begin feeling comfortable at school
2. Students begin making new friends

C. Build school community through the use of cooperative base groups

1. Students feel sense of ownership to class
2. Students look forward to coming to school

D. Self-esteem is growing as sense of community is being built

1. Students feel good about themselves
2. Students feel like a needed member of the group

E. Develop Class Rules as a community

1. Generate a list of class rules
2. Students sign rules sheet

F. Celebrate diversity by talking about how we're different but the same

1. Generate list of likenesses
2. Generate list of differences

G. Visuals - graphic organizers- exhibit class rules on posters (all children sign)

H. Literature - read a story every day pertaining to being a good citizen, cooperation and diversity (approx. 10 minutes)

II. Cooperative Grouping (October)

A. Listening Skills

1. Define good listener
2. Explain how one becomes a good listener

B. Sharing Ideas and Respect

1. Define respect
2. Model respect

C. Kindness

1. Define kindness
2. Model respect

D. Following Directions

1. Define following directions
2. Model following directions

E. Visuals - graphic organizers - posters that show large ears for listening, large eyes for visual contact

F. Literature - books that concern listening skills such as Listen Buddy, respect for one another, kindness such as Me First and following directions

III. Conflict Resolution (October/November)

A. Dialogue

1. Define conflict resolution
2. Model conflict resolution

B. Problem Solving

1. Opportunities for resolving conflicts
2. Provide choices for resolving conflicts

C. Adult Modeling of appropriate ways to problem solve

D. Stories/Literature - books about dealing with problem solving

E. Role Playing

F. Teacher's role - facilitator

G. Visuals - graphic organizers - poster with words.

Count to five

Talk it out

Walk away

Take a break

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of these interventions, students, as a class, will discuss what they have learned and the Kindergarten/First Grade Survey will be redistributed to parents to see if there has been an improvement in social skills at home. The Teacher Survey will be redistributed to teachers to see if an improvement in social skills is noticeable at school. In addition, teachers will use the Behavioral Checklists and Anecdotal Records to assess social skills for a period of four weeks.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve social competencies through the use of cooperative learning and conflict resolution. Changes in social behavior was expected due to the implementation of cooperative learning techniques and developing conflict resolution skills. Over a 15 week period, strategies were taught during formal and informal settings. The first phase of the action plan was to create a safe and nurturing environment.

During September, the first month of school, an environment where children felt welcomed and at ease was presented. Children were exposed to team building activities to promote self-esteem and promote diversity. These activities continued throughout the month to establish an atmosphere where children felt comfortable with themselves, each other and the teacher. Children's literature was used to help children understand their emotions and feelings about coming to school and making new friends. Literature was also useful in introducing basic interpersonal skills. In order to further develop a sense of community, a list of classroom rules was generated by the students. Children signed the list and it was posted in a predominant place in the classroom where it was referred to often.

Children were introduced to the concept of cooperation during the month of September. Literature, video tapes, and guest speakers were a few of the methods

used to present this interpersonal activity. The lessons were approximately ten minutes in length and occurred once a week. The concepts presented during the formal lessons were addressed daily in a nonformal setting. Direct teaching of cooperative learning skills was necessary in order to lay the foundation of cooperative learning before formal groups were formed. Lessons involved role playing between two teachers to allow the students to observe prosocial and antisocial behaviors. A class discussion followed examining the positive and negative interactions. The students decided which scenario would be the most acceptable.The students then practiced simple cooperative activities themselves through the use of think-pair-share.

Children were taught a slogan which was recited at the beginning of each day. The significance of the slogan was to have children pledge that they would be kind and caring to one another. The words of the slogan were displayed on a poster which was hung in the classroom. The words and their meaning were referred to often.

Children were assigned base groups according to tables during the fourth week of September. Each person at the table was assigned a job. The responsibility of getting ready for class and cleaning up after class was relegated to the students thus taking the accountability off the teacher. Children began taking ownership of their classroom and began feeling like a needed and active participant of a group.

During the month of October, the dynamics of cooperative grouping was continued. The focus of cooperative learning this month stressed such skills as: manners, listening, following directions, working together, showing respect to others and waiting ones turn to speak. These skills were taught, retaught and constantly monitored. Again, literature, videos, and guest speakers were some of the methods used to begin discussions. Direct teaching was used to define and redefine the skills. Activities were provided for students to continually practice using positive social competencies. Posters, such as, "Be a Listener," (see Appendix K) and "Cooperate,"

were displayed in the classroom as constant reminders. T-charts were also used to show "Looks like/Sounds like." Again, these skills were informally practiced on a daily basis. The duration of these lessons increased as children were able to sit for longer periods of time.

The third essential element of social skills instruction was conflict resolution which was introduced to the classroom starting in November. It was important not only to teach the students how to work cooperatively but to also understand their feelings and how to control them. In order to manage their feelings, the children had to be able to recognize different types of emotions. Through the use of literature, situations were presented where the students did not feel threatened personally but were able to identify with the negative behaviors of the characters in the books. Discussions followed the readings and reminders of conflict resolution were constantly revisited.

The teacher's role was always an essential element in transferring the correct terminology to be used during times of conflict. Children needed to be taught not only what to say but how to say it. Situations were created where students could observe teachers role play different incidents using appropriate language and reflect on them. The students had to decide what the acceptable behavior would be. The targeted social skill was addressed throughout the month and students who were "caught" being good were acknowledged. Children were encouraged to "tattle" on their friends when their friends did something good. Children were taught that tattling could be positive or negative. The term "In or Out" was used to explain: "Do you want to get your friend *in* trouble or *out* of trouble?"

Strategies for resolving conflicts were not only addressed in the classroom but also in music class. A song was introduced whose lyrics included options for conflict resolution. Children were taught that they could 1.) Count to five 2.) Talk it out 3.) Walk away 4.) Take a break. In addition to the musical tune, hand motions were added to

help children remember the strategies.

A parental component was also added to the interventions. A weekly newsletter to parents discussed the strategies being taught in class. Suggested follow-up activities for practice at home to reinforce these skills was advised. In addition, a monthly newsletter by the principal was added to support the importance of developing social skills.

Securing a safe climate, cooperative learning and conflict resolution were the major focuses of this paper. Children were given the strategies and opportunities to practice them on a daily basis. Three forms of assessment were used to evaluate its success and/or failure.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

During the intervention period, Behavioral Checklists and Anecdotal Records were kept to record the incidents of inappropriate behaviors at the targeted sites. Since these tools were used for only a four week period, they did not reflect a major change in behaviors. However, three other forms of assessment were used. They were a Post Kindergarten/First Grade Parent Survey, class discussion, and Post Teacher Survey. A Post Parental Cover Letter (Appendix L) was attached to a Post Parent Survey (Appendix M) which was sent home with the children involved in the study. The results of the Post Parent Survey are described below.

Post Kindergarten/First Grade Parent Survey

Of the 72 Post Kindergarten/First Grade Parent Surveys handed out, 42 surveys were returned. The results of Post Parent Survey indicated that of the16 categories listed on the Kindergarten/First Grade Survey, all but three areas showed an improvement in behavior. Of those three categories, two decreased by just 1%. Even though the results went down in those three categories, these teacher researchers felt that in the school situation, there was not a noticeable decrease in behavior in these

areas. A 9% increase in the use of verbal social manners, such as using the words please, thank you, excuse me, and I'm sorry, was noted. A 6% improvement occurred in the children's ability to follow directions. Another formidable growth appeared in the area of interrupting others. The results went from 9% in the pretest down to 1% in the post test. Table 8 shows the data comparing the pre and post tests.

Table 8

Comparison of Pre/Post Parent Surveys

Behavior	% Always		%Some of the Time		% Never		% NA	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Waits to speak	11	10	89	86	0	2	0	2
Follows directions	11	17	83	71	6	10	2	2
Uses Please	35	50	63	48	0	0	2	2
Uses Thank You	41	48	59	50	0	0	0	2
Uses Excuse Me	33	40	65	52	2	2	0	6
Uses I'm Sorry	30	36	70	59	0	5	0	0
Shares toys/ belongings	54	48	44	52	2	0	0	0
Respects other's belongings	56	55	43	45	1	0	0	0
Takes turns	44	52	54	45	0	2	2	1
Gracious loser	15	17	65	76	11	7	9	0
Resolves conflicts verbally	22	33	72	55	4	7	2	5
Interrupts others	9	1	89	88	2	8	0	3
Interrupts when talking on phone	11	10	81	83	2	7	0	0
Talks back	6	7	74	64	15	26	5	3
Wants to be first	20	12	63	78	17	10	0	0
Resolves conflicts physically	6	0	81	36	6	52	7	12

In addition to pre/post parent surveys, the targeted population was routinely asked how they felt about the social skills that were presented. A class discussion format was used.

Class Discussion

When reacting to problem situations presented in literature, children were able to respond in a positive manner; however, when incidents occurred where they were personally involved, children were less likely to respond appropriately. It appears that although the children intrinsically know the socially acceptable behavior, they still have difficulty applying it to their own personal circumstances. As an example, when reading the story, *It's Mine*, children understood the importance of sharing but during free choice time, situations arose when they did not want to share. Another example was the book *Me First*.. Children understood, after discussions, the importance of not always having to be first; however, when it was time to line up, there were still children who rushed to be first.

Even after the intervention, the targeted population still reacts impulsively without thinking of the consequences. Interestingly, when confrontations did occur between two students and they were teacher directed to work out their own problems, they were able to talk out their difficulties on their own. Therefore, once vocabulary had been introduced, the children were able to work out their differences without teacher intervention.

Class discussions were used as a tool to assess the children's perspective on appropriate behaviors. Teacher surveys were used to assess how teachers perceived students' behaviors.

Post Teacher Survey

Of the 13 surveys handed out, 10 surveys were returned. Out of seven categories, teachers recorded an improvement in all areas. Figure 9 shows the results.

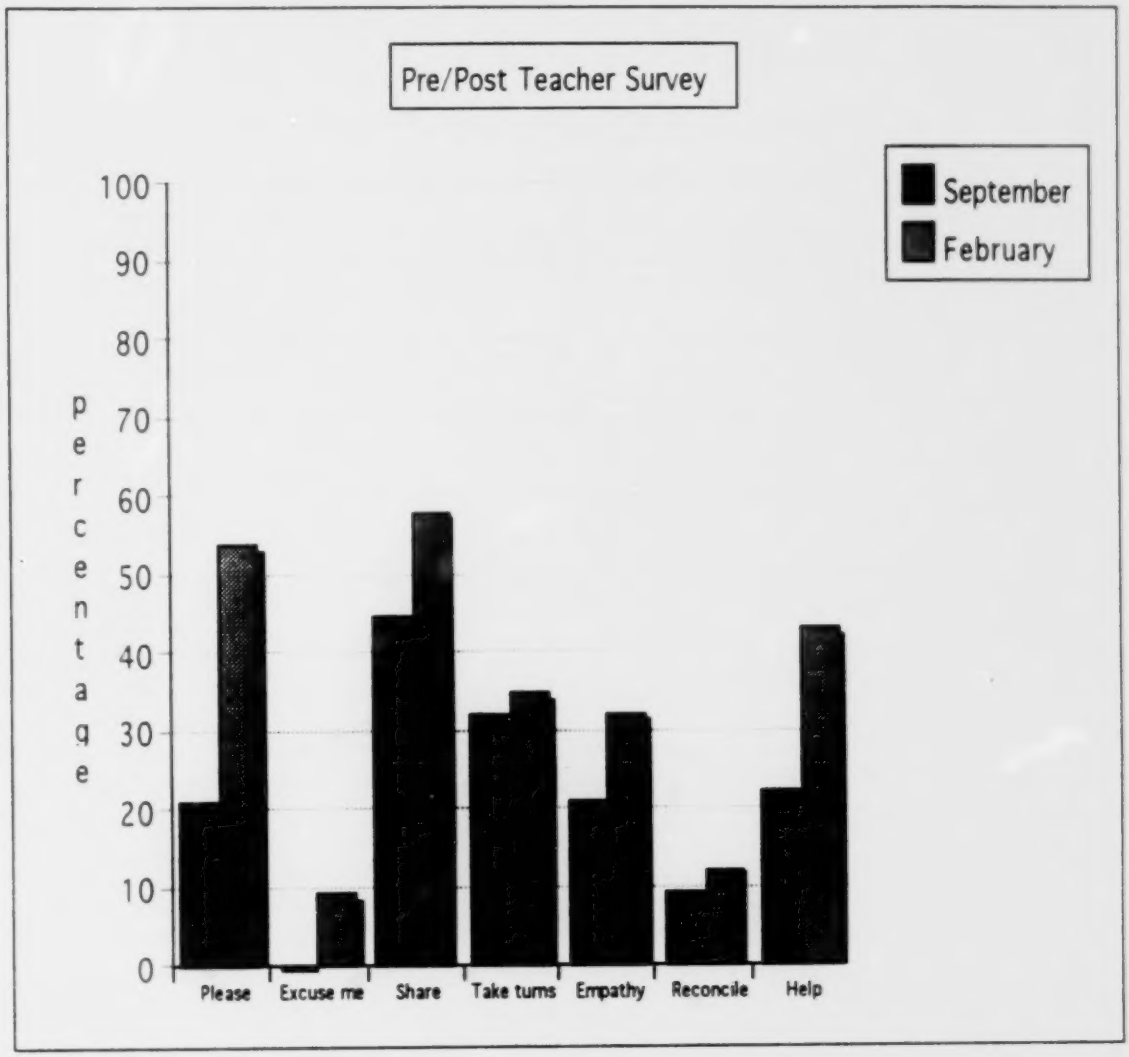

Figure 9. A comparison of behaviors from the Pre and Post Teacher Surveys distributed in September and February.

The major improvement occurred in the children's use of "please and thank you." In September, slightly more than 20% used the language and in February, almost 55% used the vocabulary. Another substantial improvement was seen in the area of helping others. The percentage went from slightly more than 20% to more than 40%. Sharing belongings was another category that demonstrated an increase in positive behaviors. The percentages went from 44% to 58%.

These areas of growth show that students do respond positively to a social skills program. However, consistent use of these skills is still not mastered in the kindergarten/first grade environment. There needs to be a continuation of a social skills program in consecutive grades.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As a result of teaching the social skills through conflict resolution and cooperative learning, a positive outcome of appropriate behavior was experienced at both site A and site B. The students were able to transfer this knowledge to everyday situations and exhibit more socially acceptable behaviors. Children were able to work together cooperatively to accomplish a common goal. It was not uncommon to hear students being supportive or offer help to their friends. Quieter voices became the rule instead of the exception. Children became sensitive to the needs of others and showed more tolerance to one another. Observation showed a growth in interpersonal skills.

For the most part, when conflicts did arise, children used their strategies to resolve their differences. Using words to explain their feelings, students were able to control their physical impulses. It became easier for children to talk out their problems rather than relying on teacher intervention.

Using literature to expose life experiences proved to be a positive instructional tool. Children's literature was a non-threatening way to experience different

interpersonal relationships. Children were able to identify with the characters without themselves feeling intimidated. The story's problem became the character's dilemma, not theirs. Solutions included not only the author's outcomes but opinions generated by student's articulation.

Although there was a shift to more favorable behaviors, children did not consistently demonstrate a mastery of the social skills presented. Due to the egotistical nature of five and six year olds, a continuance of a social skills program in consecutive grade levels may be beneficial. More research is needed in this area.

Extending a social skills program into the successive grades would allow students practice in using strategies to resolve conflicts. While in the school environment, students are encouraged to interact positively with one another and to resolve conflicts appropriately. These skills would be consistent and expected throughout the educational experience. Implementing these strategies without adult supervision would be the goal. Kindergarten/first grade is just the beginning; this skill needs much mentoring and practice before it becomes mastered.

A continuing social skills program would allow growth in interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. As students matured, relationships could be addressed in more scope and depth using literature. Instead of using literature to show situations that happens to others, the incidents could be personalized to reveal everyday experiences that the children are encountering. Role playing could be used to act out school situations that arise.

Cooperative learning should be an ongoing activity that will enable children to become happy, successful team players. Children must constantly be involved in working together to solve problems. They need to develop the resources to learn to get along with others. Taking turns, sharing, and empathizing are some of the necessary skills that are needed to succeed in life today. These are not naturally acquired in

kindergarten or first grade but must continually be developed and practiced. A continuing social skills program would provide for these constant experiences.

Overall, the researchers felt that the social skills program introduced was a success. The children learned the skills to interact positively with others in cooperative learning situations and resolving conflicts. Children acquired better listening skills, became more patient at waiting their turn and sharing responsibilities. Children became aware of the language necessary to resolve conflicts, lessening the amounts of physical confrontations. The targeted population also became more independent, thus taking some responsibilities off of the teachers. The strengths of the social skills program introduced were the constant reinforcement and practice of appropriate skills. Behaviors were dealt with on a daily basis and the children were acknowledged for making correct choices. These newly learned skills, hopefully, will enable them to become socially competent adults. The data gathered for this paper demonstrates that a social skills curriculum is effective, and may be a consideration for upper grade levels.

Although an increase in social skills was effected, there were some weaknesses in the study. The failure of some parents to return the survey decreased the sample size in the research study, which may have decreased the reliability of the data. The inherently subjective nature of surveys is a weakness in all research that incorporates them; the reliability of the survey used in this study is only as reliable as the respondents that complete them. Survey questions are vulnerable to different interpretations by those who read them. Differing interpretations may result in all of the parents basing their responses on unlike behavior.

The respondents in this scale may have had a tendency to answer in the socially desirable direction (especially in the post-test), as they were aware that they should be reporting changes (in the positive direction) regarding their child's social

competencies. The letter that went home with the post-test survey explained the intervention and the desired effect of it, which may have had an influence on parents' responses.

Another weakness in this study was the potential for lack of generalizability to other populations. The entire sample for this research was drawn from the targeted population. This population of students may not be representative of other populations across the nation, and therefore, results may not be able to be generalized to nor replicated in other populations.

This study noted an increase in the social competencies of kindergartners and first graders. However, these researchers have no way of knowing if the intervention provided lasting change. In other words, do the children continue to demonstrate solid social competencies as they move through school or was the change only temporary due to the direct teaching that occurred as part of the social skills curriculum?

In this research study, it is hoped that the positive changes noted in the children's behavior from the pre-test to the post-test were due to the intervention. However, over the course of the school year the children may have matured cognitively, socially, and emotionally, causing a natural development in social skills.

Further research, then, is necessary to establish whether or not the social skills learned in the early years are retained as children age. In addition, more research could be done to see if there are other recommendations to improve the lack of social competencies.

The goal of this research project was to improve social competencies through the use of cooperative learning and conflict resolution. A social skills program was implemented to achieve this goal. Children, at the targeted sites, responded positively to this intervention. Since, a lack of social skills is becoming a national concern, this situation must must be addressed in the school environment. Children, today, are not

taught to interact positively with others or control anger while peacefully solving problems; therefore, they are bringing their lack of social skills into the school environment. Teachers are spending much of the day dealing with these issues. To address this problem, teaching social skills for life long learning is recommended. Educators must address such topics as cooperative learning and conflict resolution as a part of the curriculum if they want their students to have success in life as caring, able, responsible people.

"We laugh and cry,
We work and play,
We help each other
Every day.
The world's a lovely
Place to be
Because we are
A family" (Hoberman, 1991, back book cover).

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APPENDIX A

KINDERGARTEN/FIRST GRADE SURVEY

KINDERGARTEN/FIRST GRADE SURVEY

Please check the box that indicates the behavior your child CONSISTENTLY demonstrates.

	ALWAYS	SOME OF THE TIME	NEVER
1. Does your child wait his/her turn to speak?			
2. Does your child interrupt when you are speaking to another adult or child?			
3. Does your child interrupt when you are talking on the phone?			
4. Does your child follow directions the first time?			
5. Does your child "talk back" to you?			
6. Does your child regularly use the following words?			
Please			
Thank you			
Excuse me			
I'm sorry			
7. Does your child share toys and other belongings easily?			
8. Does your child respect other people's belongings?			
9. Is it important to your child to always be first?			
10. Is it easy for your child to take turns (playing games, standing in line, playing with toys)?			
11. Is your child a gracious loser?			
12. How does your child resolve disagreements with a playmate?			
Talks it out (verbal)			
Gets physical (pushing, hitting, kicking)			
Withdraws (walks away)			
13. Do you monitor your child's TV viewing?			
Restrict time in front of TV			
Restrict programs watched			
14. Do you monitor the video games your child plays?			

Please return to_____by_____.

Thank you for your help!

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER FOR KINDERGARTEN/FIRST GRADE PARENT SURVEY

August, 1999

Dear Kindergarten Parent:

As you are aware, I am conducting a research project as part of my Master's Program. I am conducting a survey of parents in order to better understand the behavior exhibited by kindergarten students outside the classroom. I hope that you will help by taking a moment to answer the questions on the following page and **return the questionnaire to me by Wednesday, September 1, 1999**.

If all forms are in by that date, your child's class will be the beneficiary of a Popcorn Party!!

Please be as truthful as possible when completing the form. No names are necessary.

Thanks in advance for your assistance!

Sincerely,

APPENDIX C

TEACHER SURVEY

Dear Kindergarten Staff,

Excuse us for the interruption in your day. We are very **empathetic** to how busy you are at the start of the school year. We are **sorry** for **taking** our **turn** in taking up your time by asking you to complete the following questionnaire. But **please help** us by **sharing** your input.

Please accept this attached treat in hopes it **reconciles** any hostile feelings you may have initially felt.

Thank you for being such a **Caring, Able, Person.**

We would appreciate your input by checking the behaviors you generally observe in our building.

Kindergartners display the following behaviors:	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom
Say: Please/Thank you			
Say: Excuse me/I'm sorry			
Share			
Take turns			
Show empathy			
Reconcile differences			
Help others			

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APPENDIX D

THE BEHAVIORAL CHECKLIST

The Behavioral Checklist

WEEK_____

Subject	Does not wait turn to speak	Interrupts	Does not follow directions	Talks back	Does not use please, thank-you, etc.	Does not share easily	Does not respect other's belongings	Needs to be first	Does not take turns	Not a gracious loser	Gets physical

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APPENDIX E

ANECDOTAL RECORD

ANECDOTAL RECORD

Student:_____

Date:_____

Behavior Observed:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Date:_____

Behavior Observed:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Date:_____

Behavior Observed:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX F

CONSENT LETTER

August, 1999

Dear Kindergarten Parents:

Cheri Ciampa, Jeanne Farr and Karen Kaplan are currently enrolled in the Master's Program at St. Xavier University. As part of the requirements, we are writing a research paper on social skills in kindergarten. By writing on this topic, we wish to explore whether or not children of this age exhibit appropriate social skills and also provide experiences which will enhance their growth in this area.

During their kindergarten year, the children will be exposed to appropriate social skills using cooperative grouping and conflict resolution (solving problems). We feel these skills will give the student a strong foundation in socially acceptable behaviors.

All students will participate in the classroom activities, as they are part of the regular classroom curriculum. However, if you would not like your child's data included in the final data results, he/she will not be penalized. All information will be kept confidential. Please check the appropriate response and sign the form stating whether you do or do not give your consent.

Sincerely,

Cheri Ciampa 847-367-3210
Jeanne Farr 847-918-2170
Karen Kaplan 847-918-2170

I do give my consent for my child to participate in the study. _____

I do not give my consent for my child to participate in the study. _____

_____ _____

Parent's signature Student Name

APPENDIX G

SUGGESTED BOOKS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Suggested Books for Social Skill Development

A Book of Hugs by Dave Ross

Alexander and the Terrible , Horrible , No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst

Amos and Boris by William Steig

Annabelle Swift, Kindergartner by Amy Schwartz

Best Friends by Miriam Cohen

Bootsie Barker Bites by Barbara Bottner

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes

Clifford Makes a Friend by Norman Bridwell

Cliffords's Manners by Norman Bridwell

Doorbell Rang, The by Pat Hutchins

Do You Want to be My Friend ? by Eric Carle

Franklin's Bossy by Paulette Bourgeois and Brenda Clark

Frog and Toad Together by Arnold Loebel

Grouchy Ladybug, The by Eric Carle

How Do you Say it Today, Jesse Bear? by Nancy White Carlstrom

How Leo Learned to be King by Marcus Pfister

It's Mine by Leo Lionni

Jessica by Kevin Henkes

Kissing Hand, The by Audrey Penn

Lion and the Mouse ,The by Mary Lewis Wang

Listen Buddy by Helen Lester

Little Louie the Baby Bloomer by Robert Kraus

Little Red Hen adapted by Lucy Kincaid

Me First by Helen Lester

Nathan's Fishing Trip by LuLu Delacre

On Monday When it Rained by Cherryl Kachenmeister

Pain and the Great One, The by Judy Blume

Rachel Parker, Kindergarten Show-off by Ann Martin

Rainbow Fish, The by Marcus Pfister

Ruby the Copycat by Peggy Rothmann

Today Was a Terrible Day by Parricia Reilly Giff

We Can Get Along, A Child's Book of Choices by Lauren Murphy Payne

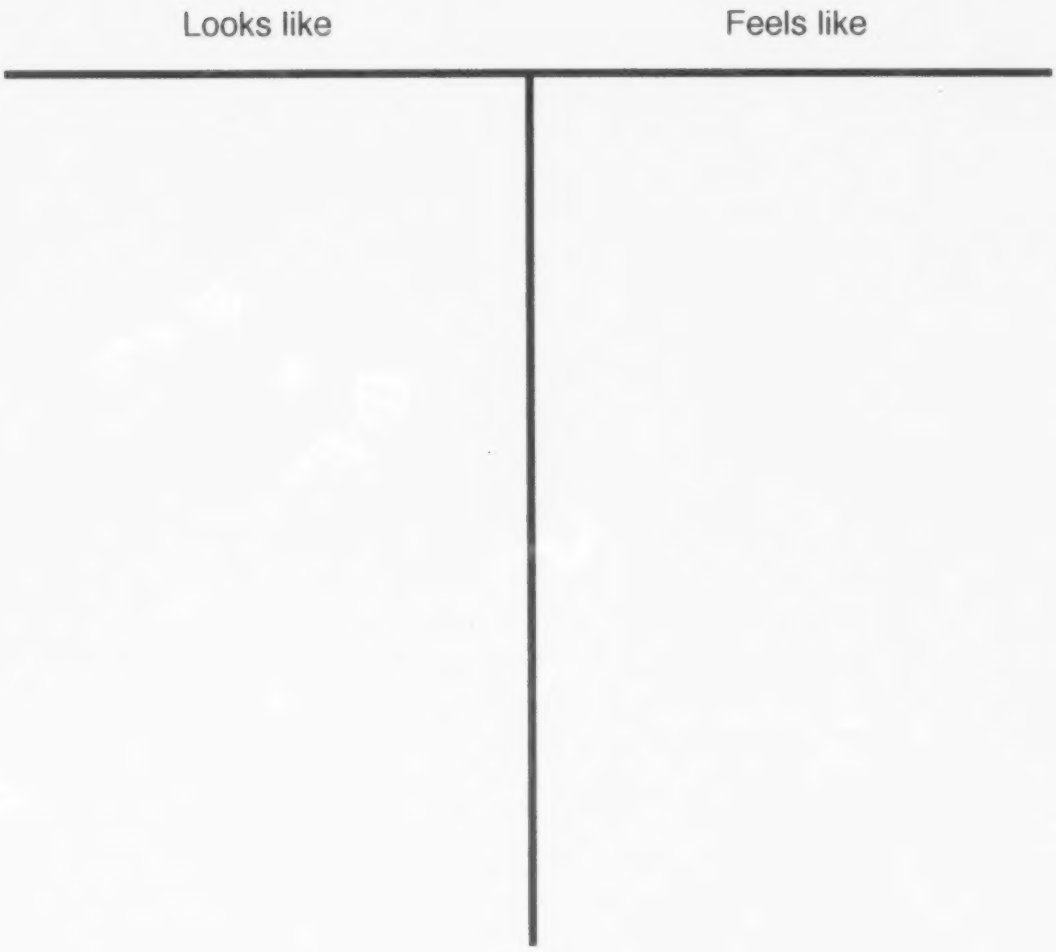
When I Was Little by Jamie Lee Curtis

Will I Have a Friend? by Miriam Cohen

APPENDIX H

T-CHART

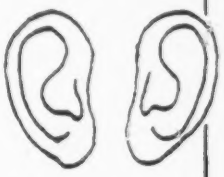
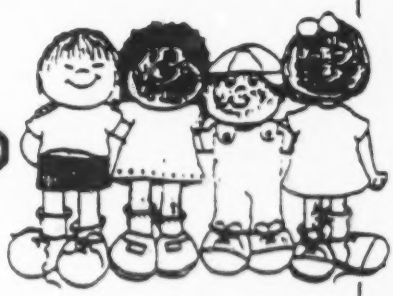
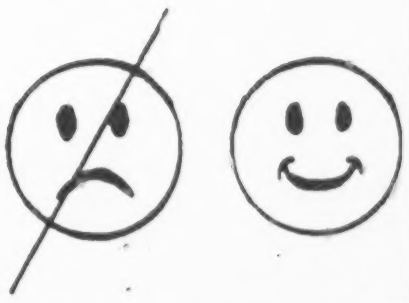
T-Chart



APPENDIX I

VISUAL POSTER

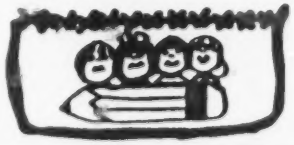
Cooperate

- Use 6" voices
- Listen to your neighbor 
- Stay with the group 
- Look at the speaker
- Don't hurt feelings 

APPENDIX J

DAILY CHECKLIST

CHECK LIST

TABLE NUMBER	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THUR.	FRI.	TOTAL
SHIRT GYM SHOES LIBRARY BOOK						
PENCIL CASE 						
MAIL						

APPENDIX K

LISTENING POSTER

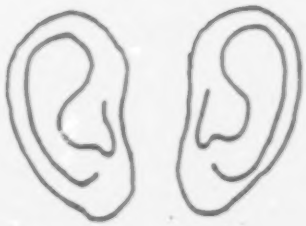
Be a Listener

STOP

Stop moving, stop talking.

LOOK

Look at the talker.

LISTEN 

Listen with your ears.

APPENDIX L

COVER LETTER - POST SURVEY

Dear Parents:

Since September, 1999, those of us in the Masters Program have used our interventions in the classroom to instill social behaviors in the children that would promote skills to enhance working together and solving conflicts. We, at school, have seen positive changes in social interactions and hope that you are seeing these positive changes at home as well.

In order to document our research, we ask you once again, to please fill out the attached survey and **return it to school by Monday, January 31, 2000**.

Thank you for allowing your student to be part of this research. We hope that through our studies, we have helped to create future citizens who will have the skills to get along with others and therefore be happy and productive members of society.

Sincerely,

Miss Cheri Ciampa
Mrs. Jeanne Farr
Mrs. Karen Kaplan

APPENDIX M

POST KINDERGARTEN/FIRST GRADE SURVEY

POST KINDERGARTEN/FIRST GRADE SURVEY

Please check the box that indicates the behavior your child CONSISTENTLY demonstrates.

	ALWAYS	SOME OF THE TIME	NEVER
1. Does your child wait his/her turn to speak?			
2. Does your child interrupt when you are speaking to another adult or child?			
3. Does your child interrupt when you are talking on the phone?			
4. Does your child follow directions the first time?			
5. Does your child "talk back" to you?			
6. Does your child regularly use the following words?			
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Thank you			
Excuse me			
I'm sorry			
7. Does your child share toys and other belongings easily?			
8. Does your child respect other people's belongings?			
9. Is it important to your child to always be first?			
10. Is it easy for your child to take turns (playing games, standing in line, playing with toys)?			
11. Is your child a gracious loser?			
12. How does your child resolve disagreements with a playmate?			
Talks it out (verbal)			
Gets physical (pushing, hitting, kicking)			
Withdraws (walks away)			

Please return to _____ by January 31, 2000.

Thank you for your help!